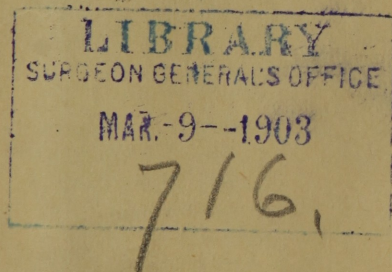


GOULD (A.A.)

Notice of the origin,
progress and present
condition of the Boston
Society of Natural History.



N O T I C E
OF THE
ORIGIN, PROGRESS, AND PRESENT CONDITION
OF THE
BOSTON SOCIETY OF NATURAL HISTORY.

By AUGUSTUS A. GOULD, M. D., of Boston, Ms.

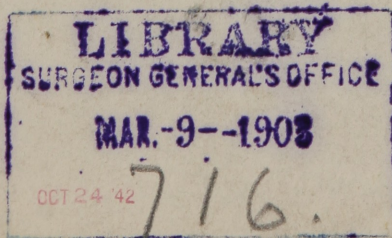
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In the winter of 1830, a few gentlemen of scientific attainments conceived the design of forming a Society, in Boston, for the promotion of Natural History. After several preliminary meetings, and communicating their designs to others who they supposed would be favorably disposed towards them, a meeting was called on the 28th of April, 1830. It was organized by the choice of Dr. Walter Channing as Moderator, and Theophilus Parsons, Esq., as Secretary. They then resolved to form themselves into a Society under the name of the "BOSTON SOCIETY OF NATURAL HISTORY." On the 6th of May a Constitution and By-laws were adopted; and, on the 13th of the same month, officers were chosen. An Act of Incorporation was obtained at the next session of the Legislature, and bears date February 24, 1831.

The great object had in view in the formation of the Society was to promote a taste, and afford facilities for the pursuit of Natural History by mutual co-operation, and the collection of a Cabinet and Library. But it has always been understood, that especial attention should be given to the investigation of the objects in our own immediate vicinity.

The officers of the Society are a President, two Vice Presidents, Corresponding and Recording Secretaries, Treasurer, Librarian, eight Curators and a Cabinet keeper. These officers constitute a Council on which devolves the management of the business concerns of the Society. These are chosen annually, by ballot, on the first Wednesday in May.

THOMAS NUTTALL, Esq., the well-known botanist and ornithologist, was chosen the first president; but as he regarded himself as only a transient resident in Boston, he declined the office.



The following gentlemen have sustained the several offices, from the organization of the Society to the present time.

| <i>Presidents.</i> | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Benjamin D. Greene, Esq., | 1830—1837 |
| George B. Emerson, Esq., | 1837— |

| <i>Vice Presidents.</i> | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| George Hayward, M. D., | 1830—1832 |
| John Ware, M. D., | 1830—1836 |
| Hon. Francis C. Gray, | 1832—1834 |
| Rev. F. W. P. Greenwood, | 1834—1841 |
| Walter Channing, M. D., | 1836—1837 |
| Amos Binney, Esq., | 1837— |
| Charles T. Jackson, M. D. | 1841— |

| <i>Treasurers.</i> | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Simon E. Greene, Esq., | 1830—1832 |
| Amos Binney, Esq., | 1832—1834 |
| E. S. Dixwell, Esq., | 1834—1837 |
| Ezra Weston Jr., Esq., | 1837—1839 |
| John James Dixwell, Esq., | 1839— |

| <i>Corresponding Secretaries.</i> | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Gamaliel Bradford, M. D., | 1830—1834 |
| Amos Binney, Esq., | 1834—1837 |
| E. S. Dixwell, Esq., | 1837— |

| <i>Recording Secretaries.</i> | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Theophilus Parsons, Esq., | 1830—1830 |
| D. Humphreys Sabor, M. D., | 1830—1836 |
| Martin Gay, M. D., | 1836—1838 |
| Augustus A. Gould, M. D., | 1838—1839 |
| Jeffries Wyman, M. D., | 1839—1840 |
| F. A. Eddy, M. D., | 1840— |

| <i>Librarians.</i> | |
|--------------------|-----------|
| Seth Bass, M. D., | 1830—1832 |

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Charles Amory, M. D., | 1832—1833 |
| Charles K. Dillaway, Esq., | 1833— |

| <i>Curators.</i> | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Hon. Francis C. Gray. | |
| Walter Channing, M. D. | |
| Edward Brooks, Esq. | |
| Benj. D. Greene, Esq. | |
| Amos Binney, Esq. | |
| J. W. McKean, M. D. | |
| Geo. B. Emerson, Esq. | |
| Francis Alger. | |
| J. S. C. Greene, M. D. | |
| Joshua B. Flint, M. D. | |
| A. A. Gould, M. D. | |
| Winslow Lewis Jr., M. D. | |
| William B. Fowle. | |
| Clement Durgin. | |
| Geo. W. Otis, M. D. | |
| Charles T. Jackson, M. D. | |
| J. B. S. Jackson, M. D. | |
| J. E. Teschemacher. | |
| T. William Harris, M. D. | |
| Martin Gay, M. D. | |
| D. H. Storer, M. D. | |
| Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, M. D. | |
| Thomas M. Brewer, M. D. | |
| Jeffries Wyman, M. D. | |
| Marshall S. Scudder. | |
| Thomas T. Bouvé. | |

| <i>Cabinet Keepers.</i> | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Estes Howe. | |
| T. M. Brewer. | |
| Samuel Cabot, Jr. | |
| S. L. Abbot. | |

It is not a requisite for membership that a person should be practically engaged, or immediately interested in the study of Natural History. Any person who is willing to contribute to the support of the Society, either from personal interest or because he regards it as an institution calculated to conduce to the public good, may become a member. The consequence is, that the whole number of immediate members compared with the working men of the Society is very great. The privileges of the members are, free access to the Cabinet at all times on application to any member of the Council—the use of the Library—and admission to all Lectures given in the name of the Society. Fifty dollars paid at any one time, constitutes one a *patron*; the immediate members are subject to an annual assessment of three dollars, and any member paying thirty dollars at one time is exempt from future assessments.

The operations of the Society may be arranged under the following heads, viz :

I. MEETINGS. Regular meetings are holden on the afternoons of the first and third Wednesdays of each month. They may be multiplied or otherwise

arranged, as they occasionally have been, to weekly meetings, and to evening sessions. At these meetings, the business of the Society is transacted, scientific communications are heard, and donations are received. It has long been the custom, and one attended with great benefit, to commit every donation, whether it be a specimen or a book, to some member, whose duty it is to ascertain its name and any thing interesting pertaining to it, and perhaps make it the nucleus for an essay on some department of natural science. Thus, by mutual assistance, each member may readily gain a general knowledge of every article and book of which the Society comes in possession. Thus, the members, by having a duty imposed upon them, are not left entirely to their voluntary contributions; and many an one has thus been induced to engage in scientific investigations which he would never have thought of undertaking, if left to his own motion. Many an one, by getting his interest once excited to study, with a scientific eye, some object with which he is familiar in every day life, soon finds himself fairly entered upon a path which he ever after pursues with zealous and successful speed.

II. LECTURES. In the early days of the Society it was deemed that one of the most direct modes to call public attention to the subject would be to procure courses of lectures. Accordingly, four courses on various subjects connected with Natural History were given, with good success. These were mostly given by the original members of the Society. But courses of lectures on miscellaneous subjects, for which it was not difficult to procure lecturers, at merely nominal prices, sprung rapidly up, and occupied every evening of the week; so that at length it seemed expedient to discontinue those on Natural History. The main object, however, of their institution, had been extensively gained. Since then, the public has occasionally been invited to attend the regular meetings of the Society for several months in succession, during which time individual members pledged themselves to occupy the time of each meeting. These meetings were well attended.

III. PUBLICATIONS. Soon after the Society went into operation, a periodical publication was commenced under the title of the "*Boston Journal of Natural History*." It is of the octavo size, printed on fine paper, and in the best manner. Each subject is illustrated by figures, so far as is desirable, and each volume of 500 pages contains from ten to thirty plates. Hitherto, about half a volume has appeared annually, in two parts; and the third volume is now completed. This work is already becoming important as a work of reference, and will soon be indispensable to every student of American Natural History. It contains many important papers, such as the posthumous entomological papers of Mr. Say, Dr. Kirtland's monography of the Fishes of the Ohio, Dr. Storer's Fishes of Massachusetts, Dr. Binney's monography of the Helices of the United States, the Conchological papers of Messrs. Couthouy, Adams, and others; and the reprint of the various Zoological Reports pertaining to the State of Massachusetts. Papers are invited from naturalists in any part of the United States. It is by its publications alone, that the Society can expect to be extensively useful, diffusing the facts gathered by its

members, and securing to them their honest due as original observers. The circulation of the journal is now nearly sufficient to defray the expense of its publication; and the demand for it, especially from abroad, is rapidly increasing.

The Society has also published and distributed, gratuitously, the discourses given at annual meetings, by Dr. Walter Channing, Rev. H. Winslow and J. E. Teschemacher, Esq. Arrangements have also been made to publish an abstract of the doings of the meetings in a form to be extensively and promptly circulated, as is now done by most other scientific bodies.

IV. THE FORMATION OF A CABINET. This was naturally the first object to which the attention of inexperienced naturalists would be turned. Any one may be a collector, though he may not enter upon the intimate study of natural productions, and can thus gather the materials on which others may labor. Consequently, a collection was formed with a rapidity equivalent to the zeal of a newly formed Society with numerous members. The nucleus of the Cabinet consisted of a collection of about one thousand species of shells, deposited by Amos Binney, Esq., and the geological and mineralogical collection of Dr. C. T. Jackson, second in completeness to no other cabinet in America. Not long after this a very important addition was made by J. N. Reynolds, Esq., of his collections made during a visit to the Antarctic seas and S. America, comprising upwards of 400 birds' skins, numerous plants, shells, minerals, organic remains, insects, eggs, &c. Another large addition was made by Joseph P. Couthouy, Esq., who, on joining the Exploring Expedition, generously placed in the Society's Cabinet about 800 species of choice shells. Around these rapidly clustered other birds, fishes, reptiles, insects, skeletons and plants. Some of the principal objects in the hall are, the skeletons of an elephant, rhinoceros, Galapago tortoise, Cape ground-hog, ostrich, &c. To particularize any of the most valuable donations made by those who have remembered the Society at home and abroad, would be doing injustice to the favors of other persons equally entitled to gratitude. The hall over the Savings Bank is now crowded, and the following schedule will give some idea of the present extent of the collection. In the department of *Mammalia* there are skeletons and parts of skeletons, and a few stuffed skins of 200 animals;—of *Birds*, about 450 skins, of which only about 100 are mounted, with about 50 nests and 200 eggs;—*Fishes*, 400 species, including a nearly complete suite of the fishes of Massachusetts;—*Reptiles*, 150 species, embracing all those of this State;—*Insects*, not less than 4,000 species, and more especially valuable from comprising the entire collection, with the Journal, made by Prof. Hentz, and the labor bestowed upon their arrangement by Dr. T. W. Harris, who is now unquestionably at the head of Entomology in America;—*Shells*, about 4,000 species, arranged in a very convenient manner, and mostly labelled;—*Minerals*, 800 specimens in addition to the collection of Dr. C. T. Jackson, and the collection of Rocks, Minerals and Soils made by Prof. Hitchcock, illustrating the mineralogy and geology of the State;—*Crustacea*, 150 species;—*Plants*, 5,000, partially arranged, with numerous specimens of wood and fruits;—and the collections of corals and radiated animals are very respectable.

The Cabinet of Dr. Jackson has not yet become the property of the Society,

but in the course of the last year Mr. Binney offered to relinquish to the Society all claim to the collection of shells deposited by him, provided other gentlemen who had collections would contribute such shells as they might have, which were not in the Society's Cabinet, or such as would materially improve upon the specimens already possessed. This proposition was readily assented to, and in consequence, about a thousand species were added from the cabinets of Rev. F. W. P. Greenwood, G. B. Emerson, Esq., J. J. & E. S. Dixwell, Esquires, Drs. D. H. Storer and A. A. Gould, and Messrs. T. J. Whittemore, John Warren and Stephen Emmons; so that the entire collection of Shells is now the property of the Society.

V. EXHIBITIONS. It has been the policy of the Society to discountenance anything like exclusive privileges, and to make as available as possible any advantages to be derived from its operations. It was early decided that no fees should be received from visitors to the Cabinet; and for several years, the room has been opened every Wednesday from 12 to 2 o'clock, for the free admission of any persons, whether young or old, who might wish to examine it. It has been a favorite resort of the curious and inquisitive at those periods. Every one seems to respect the liberty given him, and scarcely has an instance been known of an article having been removed or damaged, which has not been promptly replaced. Many donations are obtained from persons thus visiting the collection, and a taste for natural productions is thus widely diffused.

VI. FORMATION OF A LIBRARY. When the Society originated, the great difficulty in the way of making advances in the study of Natural History, was the want of books. No one possessed more than a few volumes on some subject to which he might have given his individual attention. The importance of forming a Library was at once felt; and most of these scattered volumes have been collected, until there are now about 1,000 volumes in the Library. Most of these have been donations, either directly, or after having been purchased by private subscription, nothing being drawn from the general fund of the Society. It is gratifying to be able to record the liberal donations of Charles Amory, Esq., B. D. Greene, Esq., of the Hon. John Davis, who contributed fifty-two volumes of standard works on Natural History, most of them botanical; the bequest of Simon E. Greene, Esq., one of the original members, who left to the Society all the works in his library on Natural History, amounting to 38 volumes, as well as his large collection of Shells and Minerals; the great work of Audubon on American Ornithology, which was presented by the liberality of Amos Lawrence, B. D. Greene, S. A. Eliot, David Eckley, G. B. Emerson, Charles Amory, Wm. Ingalls, G. C. Shattuck, G. C. Shattuck Jr., Mrs. Shattuck, and Geo. Parkman; and the very rare and valuable work of Olivier on the Natural History of Insects, with the Supplement by Voet, in 10 quarto volumes, colored plates, which was purchased of Prof. N. M. Hentz, together with his entire collection of Insects, numbering about 30,000 specimens, by the subscriptions of Drs. James Jackson, John Randall, B. D. Greene; Francis C. Gray, Horace Gray, Jonathan Phillips and David Henshaw, Esquires, and other

liberal gentlemen, who prefer that their names should not be divulged; and above all, the princely gift of a superb copy of Audubon's Birds of America, full bound in Russia leather and gilt, the most expensive copy in the country, from the Hon. THOMAS H. PERKINS. In consequence of this last donation, the consent of the donors of the duplicate copy was obtained to exchange it for other standard works, especially works on Ornithology. This was done at nearly the original cost of the work, and the number of volumes in the library was thereby greatly increased.

Another and a permanent source for the constant increase of the library, is the legacy of the late Ambrose Courtis, Esq., of which mention will be made hereafter.

When we consider how essential a library is to the study and arrangement of every department of the Cabinet, it cannot but be felt that the members have done wisely to contribute largely towards it. It is of vital importance that the naturalist, who is engaged in the investigation of any subject, should be able to know *all* that has been written upon his subject. Scientific books are expensive, and no man among us can promise himself such a library as he may need. It is the part of wisdom and interest, therefore, to collect the volumes, which are scattered here and there, into one common stock. They will thus be vastly more useful than when shut up in private libraries.

FINANCES. Until quite recently, the only resources of the Society have been the proceeds of lectures and the annual assessments. The former were nearly adequate to the expense of the furniture of the Hall and the show-cases, all of which are made of mahogany. The latter have been nearly sufficient to pay the rent of the Hall, and the incidental expenses of the Society. No money has been appropriated from the funds of the Society for the purchase or the preservation of objects. All the articles in the Cabinet have either been presented, or, when any have been purchased, as has often been done, it has been by contributions; and all the labor of preservation and classification has been done by the voluntary labor of the members.

In the year 1835, the Legislature of Massachusetts, in appropriating money in aid of various institutions for the furtherance of education, voted to the Boston Society of Natural History \$300 per annum, for five years. And in 1840, Simon E. Greene, Esq., in addition to his library and collection of shells and minerals, bequeathed five hundred dollars in money, for the general purposes of the Society. These sums, together with the resources mentioned above, have been sufficient to defray all the outfit and incidental expenses, so that at the last annual meeting, in May, the Society was declared, and for the first time, *out of debt*.

The Society is indebted for its first permanent endowment to the generosity of one of its members, AMBROSE S. COURTIS, Esq. Mr. Courtis was a merchant, comparatively little known among scientific men, who by diligence and prudence was enabled to retire with a competence while yet a young man, intending to devote his subsequent life to the acquirement and diffusion of knowledge, and filled with generous and exalted designs for the promotion of science, art and humanity. While in Europe in 1834, he gave the first token of his re-

gard for the Society, in the present of a splendid solar microscope, with an achromatic lens, made by Dollond, of London. Soon afterwards he forwarded a copy of his will, by which he devised to the Society several sums for specific purposes, amounting in all to \$15,000, and an order for the immediate payment of a part of it, lest perchance his intentions might be defeated. Mr. C. did not live to return to this country. In his last will he not only confirmed his previous legacies to the Society, but made it his residuary legatee. The legacies however were accompanied by embarrassing conditions, which would forbid their direct application to the uses of the Society for a long period of years. Permission was therefore obtained from the Legislature of the State, to which his legacies reverted in case they were not accepted, to compromise with the heirs at law; and the sum of \$10,000 was eventually received for the unconditional and immediate use of the Society. This sum now constitutes the permanent fund of the Society, the principal of which is not to be encroached upon. For the present, its income is appropriated as follows, viz: one-third to the increase of the Library, one third to the preservation of objects for the Cabinet, and the remaining third for the publication of the Journal.

The Society may now be considered as established upon a firm foundation. It has existed long enough to have left its impress upon the community. By admitting to membership all who are interested in its objects, and by giving gratuitous access to the Cabinet and Library on application to a member, at all times, and to all persons, either for study or the gratification of curiosity, it strives to make this impress as wide and as deep as possible. It is believed that this Society was the first to adopt a course in this last respect, which, we are happy to say, is now pursued in all similar institutions in this country. It is also believed that the policy and privileges of this institution approach as nearly to the design of a distinguished foreigner, M. Vattermare, in their universality, as the state of society renders desirable or available in a country where the voluntary principle so successfully sustains every institution and every enterprise.

In addition to the influences of the Society upon the community in behalf of Natural Science through its Lectures, its Cabinet, its Library and its Journal, it may be truly said, that the Zoological and Botanical survey of the State, in connection with the Geological survey, was mainly devised, obtained and executed by its Council. The result of this survey is such as to reflect honor upon the liberality of the State which ordered it, and the science of the Commissioners who performed it.

The present fund of the Society may possibly suffice, for a while, for the objects to which it is appropriated. But there are other wants already urgent, and which are daily multiplying and becoming more imperative. So large a collection cannot be kept in proper order without being under the charge of a competent person, entirely devoted to its care. Such a person the Society has not the means for employing. Again, the Hall which now contains the Cabinet, is already crowded to excess, and its accommodations must soon be enlarged. It is already very desirable, and almost necessary, that a building should be obtained sufficiently ample and conveniently constructed for the purposes of the Society. Hitherto, the funds have been exclusively devoted to the neces-

sary and the best uses of the Society, and not wasted, as has been too often done, in brick and mortar. It is to be hoped that no necessity shall arise for diverting them from their accustomed channel; and it cannot be doubted, that when a building shall become absolutely necessary, an appeal in behalf of an institution so valuable and so liberal, to those in Boston who feel always ready to contribute freely for objects of public good, and who deem a bestowment upon such objects as the best disposition they can make of their fortunes for the benefit of their children, would not be made without a ready response.

